

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

UK's MatchesFashion withdraws offending swimwear with Hindu gods pictured front and back

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Oh God no: Hindu deities emblazoned across a pair of swimming trunks from Amiri that was withdrawn from MatchesFashion after an objection. Image credit: MatchesFashion, Amiri

By MICKEY ALAM KHAN

Online retailer MatchesFashion removed a pair of swimming trunks after facing criticism for stocking the item that featured images of Hindu gods in an inappropriate setting.

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The London-based MatchesFashion pulled the swimwear item from the Amiri brand within a day of being called out for trivializing Hindu religious beliefs. The retailer also offered an apology to Rajan Zed, U.S.-based president of the Universal Society of Hinduism and the prime objector of the offending swimwear.

"We have removed the item from the site and furthermore we have circulated your email directly to our buying team to make them aware of such sensitivities moving forward," Paul Watson, MatchesFashion head of communications, told Mr. Zed in an email.

"We trust this meets with your approval and apologize for any offense caused," he said. "This was not intentional."



Not a fit: the Amiri swimwear depicting Hindu deities alongside singers Bob Marley and Jim Morrison. Image credit: MatchesFashion, Amiri

In hot water

The swimwear featured Hindu deities such as Lakshmi, Brahma, Ganesha, Hanuman and Agni in all their armored finery with a psychedelic aura.

The deities' images are bookended with shots of reggae pioneer Bob Marley and The Doors' Jim Morrison, themselves dressed up like Hindu gods.

The swimming trunks cost \$273 per pair.



Amiri swim trunks (back) that was withdrawn by MatchesFashion. Image credit: MatchesFashion, Amiri

Mr. Zed thanked [MatchesFashion](#) for understanding the concerns of Hindu community, which regards images of deities on such products as insensitive.

This is not the first time a Western brand or retailer has been called out for insensitivity toward Hindu deities or Indian leaders.

In 1997, British Hindus were upset that footwear brand Clarks named a pair of sandals "Vishnu" and another pair of black boots "Krishna." Both names belong to gods revered by Hindus.

Clarks apologized for that misstep, but it came a few months after Nike used the Arabic script for Allah on a range of trainers.

Similarly, images for Hindu deities Ganesha, Rama, Kali and Durga have appeared on merchandise from several brands and retailers, although particular offense is taken with their application on footwear and apparel.

Only three years ago, Amazon Canada came under fire from the Indian government for selling flip-flop slippers from CafPress with images of Hindu god Shiva and statesman Mahatma Gandhi holding a machine gun.

The retailer also sold a doormat from CafPress with the Indian flag's design emblazoned across.



More flop than flip: Amazon was forced to withdraw the CafPress-made flip-flop slippers with Vishnu and Gandhi's images from its Canada store after a furor from Indian consumers and an Indian government minister

No ifs and butts

Almost 1.1 billion people follow various beliefs under Hinduism, making it the third-largest religious group worldwide after Christianity and Islam.

Mr. Zed suggests that MatchesFashion and other companies should send their senior executives for training in religious and cultural sensitivity to be better equipped when launching new products and ad campaigns.

Inappropriate usage of Hindu deities, icons, concepts or symbols for commercial purposes or other agenda was not OK as it hurt the devotees, Mr. Zed said.

"Many Hindu deities displayed on these [MatchesFashion-sold] shorts were highly revered in Hinduism and were meant to be worshipped in temples or home shrines," Mr. Zed said, "and not to adorn one's thighs, hips, groin, buttocks, genitals and pelvis."